

RABAUL - QUEEN ELIZABETH PARK

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

9 JULY 1970

There is division amongst the Tolai people...brother's hand is raised against brother, and instead of people sitting down to try and reach friendly agreement by discussion, people are hurting and beating those who disagree with them.

Peace is better than that kind of fighting, agreement by discussion is better than name-calling and hurting each other, and yet this happens today in the Peninsula. And why?

There has been some disagreement over whether there should or should not be a Multi-Racial Council or a Local Council. We have said and I have said on behalf of the Australian Government that we wish to discover what it is that most of the people in this Peninsula want by way of a Council.

If most of the Tolai people on the Peninsula wish not to have a Multi-Racial Council, then we would be prepared not to have a Multi-Racial Council. If most of the Tolai people on the Peninsula want a Multi-Racial Council, then we would be prepared to have that. But we need to know what it is that most of the people want.

I said that some months ago to one of the leaders of the Mataungan Association, Mr. Kaputin. I said: "Let us have a referendum. Let the people vote. Let them say what they want." And I repeat that offer to all the people of this Peninsula today.

But such a vote would need to be a secret one because when people already are beating each other some may be frightened to come out openly and say what they think for fear of being hurt. So the best way is a secret vote, and is this not handing over to the Tolai people the solution of this problem? I think it is.

So I would speak not only to the people gathered here but to all those through the length and breadth of this Peninsula. And I would say to each one of them: Sit down in your own house, talk to your neighbours quietly. Ask yourself: "Would it not be better to have unity than division? Would it not be better to have discussion than fighting? Would it not be better to find out what most want and then agree with what most want?" I ask all those living here to do that.

I have been told by some - I think a minority-but by some, that what is wanted here is self-government now, but self-government for what? For New Britain? Because New Britain has many other races than the Tolai. And if not for New Britain, then for what? For the Gazelle Peninsula only? Is that asked for?

If it means self-government for the Gazelle Peninsula, what will the results be for the people who live here? They will have left the Territory. They will no longer be one unit of what is to be a nation. They will not have the right to share in riches discovered in copper in Bougainville, or riches which may be discovered

in oil in Papua or in the industrial development of all the rest of the Territory. They would have no right because they would be gone. Do they want that?

Is it not true that there are many Tolai now who go to Papua, or to New Guinea or to other parts of the Territory and who work to high positions in the Administration or in the Police Force or in industry. Surely Tolais would want that opportunity to continue, would not want to break off from what should be a united nation.

There have already been very great steps towards transferring more power to the people of the Territory, announced less than a week ago, and ultimately there will undoubtedly be self-government for all. But those who tell you that the Gazelle Peninsula or the Tolai people would be better separate are telling you untruly and would damage your opportunity for work and would damage your opportunity to share in the wealth of the whole nation.

And I would like all the people in the Peninsula quietly, in their own houses, talking to their relatives and their friends, again to consider on this matter whether what I tell you is not true. And if you come to the conclusion that it is true, that it is to your advantage and to the interest of all the Tolai people, then let that voice be known by casting votes for those who agree with you in the House of Assembly, by letting the wishes of the people be known to Councillors and to others who will be influenced by what you say.

So I have spoken to you of the Multi-Racial Council, I have spoken of why I think it would be bad for the people here to have self-government now, if indeed that meant anything for an area of this size, and I know that these are problems and that there are other problems to do with land tenure in the Peninsula.

I have asked the leaders of the Mataungan Society to come to see me, to talk about these problems, to try to solve them, to see if we can reach agreement. But they have refused to do this. They have refused to exchange ideas. I would like those Tolai who live on this Peninsula to let it be known that most of the people want these things to be discussed in a friendly way, want them to be resolved, want there to be a stop to beatings, to hurtful name-calling, to spitefulness and to divisions.

Do not think that there would be any support from Australia for those who have caused divisions in this country. I know another politician came here some time ago and indicated that there might be such support. This is the Leader of the Opposition. He is not in the Government. . . . he can do nothing. And this should be known to all the people in this Territory.

And for the last things I shall say to you, I say this. We must, while we are here, see that the law is observed for the protection of all people here.

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We want to stay and help in the Administration and the Government and the provision of funds to the Territory including the Gazelle Peninsula, for as long as we are wanted. . . . and we will do that. When most people wish us to go, which I think would not be until we have helped to build up the industries, to build up the economic capacity of this Peninsula and of all the rest of the Territory, if people then wish us to go, we would be happy to go. For we have no wish to administer or govern one minute after most of the people in the Territory want us to leave.

And for the rest, I hope and I believe that the people here and in the rest of the Territory will for the years ahead want that kind of partnership which has shown such progress in twenty years, will want to have more and more say in the running of their government, as they will. And that when the Tolai can heal the division within themselves, then we can all shake hands as brothers and tackle the task of construction instead of destruction which lies in front of us and which we want to do together.

Thank you for listening, both townspeople who are here and the Tolai who are here. I hope that my words, and my suggestions and requests for peaceful co-operation, will be heard far beyond the confines of this meeting and will help for the future prosperity of the Gazelle Peninsula if the majority of people here agree that what I have said is the best path for us all to follow.

Thank you.
